



[Mahmood Mamdani](#)

## Citizen and Subject

[Mahmood Mamdani](#)'s "Citizen and Subject" (downloadable extract linked below) maps the relations of four class-based powers in the anti-Imperial struggles in Africa: Bourgeois, Proletarians, Imperialists and "Traditional Leaders". The (national) Bourgeois and the Proletarians are the modernisers and the democrats, who are compelled by necessity to combine together to fight for the democracy that forms the nation.

Capitalism has failed, and Imperialism has failed. In South Africa, capitalist Imperialism arrived more than 114 years ago, and it never delivered to the people or even employed more than a fraction of them at any time. It started bad and it got no better. Recently it has gone from a boom from which the masses somehow failed to benefit, to a recession that will last for years. What's new? The same excuses have been there all along. Maybe it is truer to say that Imperialism didn't fail: it only lied. It was never going to deliver, and it never will.



[Walter Rodney, 1942-1980](#)

Like Issa Shivji and **Walter Rodney** (author of “[How Europe Underdeveloped Africa](#)”, also downloadable in [1069 KB] PDF format [by clicking here](#)), Professor Mamdani is a cadre of the famous Dar-es-Salaam campus. Mamdani is now Director of the [Makerere Institute of Social Research](#) (MISR) in his native Uganda, and has previously served in many capacities including at Columbia University, New York, USA, and the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Note that Mamdani's sense of the word “subject” in this work is different and opposite from the usual communist, or philosophical one. Here it means a subordinate person, like for example the subject of a king, and not a free person.

In the book, Mamdani’s principal insight is to recognise the class alliance typically sought by the Imperialists in neo-colonial Africa countries. According to Mamdani, the Imperialists prefer to ally with the most backward rural feudal elements (often called “traditional leaders” or “chiefs” in Africa) in opposition to

the modernising bourgeoisie and proletariat of the cities and towns.

Mamdani regards South Africa as the classic case in this regard, although he quotes many other examples. Mamdani's analysis stands in contrast with a common presumption, namely that the Imperialist monopoly-capitalists tend to work through "compradors", who are local aspirant bourgeoisie, or bourgeoisie-for-rent, who do the Imperialists work for them.

Such compradors do exist, and clearly they exist in South Africa. Yet Mamdani's scheme reflects the facts and history of Imperialism in Africa better, at least up to now. Imperialism is in general hostile to the national bourgeoisie. The typical neo-colonial war of recent decades, including the Iraq war, the long war against Afghanistan, the war against Libya, and the war against Syria, is a war of Imperialism against a national bourgeoisie that wants national sovereignty and control over its country's national resources.

In the light of this analysis it becomes easier to see why it is that the South African proletariat has long been, via the ANC, in alliance with parts of its national bourgeoisie, for national liberation, against the monopoly-capitalist oppressors with their Imperial-globalist links.

The Imperialists make a marriage of convenience with the most retrogressive social power that they can find – tribalism – in a pact to hold Africa where it was under colonialism: partly rich, but mostly dirt poor. In South Africa the Imperialists relied

heavily on Bantustan leaders and on the Inkatha Freedom Party, but the ANC was able to form better links with the rural as well as with the urban masses, thus achieving a class alliance that could, and in fact did, dominate the country in terms of mass support.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Citizen and Subject, Chapter 8, 1996, Mamdani.](#)
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